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WALTERS, DAISY HARDY.
STORIES FROM GREENWOOD
COUNTY PIONEER WOMEN

Stories From Greenwood County

Pioneer Women



Ole Holverson's log cabin built in 1859.

Pictured many years later, granddaughter standing nearby.

Stories by Daisy Hardy Walters

Written in 1916 for the

Kansas City Star

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STORIES FROM GREENWOOD COUNTY PIONEER WOMEN

A page in last Sunday's edition of the Kansas City Star was devoted to "pioneer Days in Greenwood County," as told by some of the county's pioneer women. Pictures of the old mill near Eureka, the stone "mansion" to which Mrs. Edwin Tucker came as a bride, and the modern farm home of the Hammonds northwest of town made the article attractive and most interesting to all Greenwood county people. Part of it is published below and will be concluded next week.

It is curious that in the records of Early Settlers Associations there is small mention of the women who came to Kansas in the late '50's. An occasional notice of the death of some pioneer's wife is the only historical memory of the mothers of a new race, a race which two generations, too late to benefit them, has brought electrical appliances for washing clothes, and other household labor saving devices, out onto the prairie.

There were practically no single men among the home seekers who first settled Kansas. Women were as necessary to the establishment of the country as the oxen and the prairie schooners, and of as little individual importance, it would seem; that is, unless you are of their blood.

These venerable women, those who are left do not ask recognition. They sit in these, their belated days of rest, quietly beside their windows and watch their daughters, their granddaughters, and, some of them, their great-granddaughters, darting here and there across the country, practicing their trades and professions, voicing their rights and needs, and solving their problems in public. And they smile, these old women, be sure of that, for women who survived the hardships and disappointments of pioneer days, to all their other virtues most need add that of humor.

It was usually mother who decided "back East" that the sacrifice was not too great; it was mother who left most behind when she joined the slow-moving procession across the plains. Yet by nature it is women who live in the past, women who cling most closely to the old, and women who most love the gentle luxuries of civilization. These pioneer women had already distinguished themselves before they reached the new country.

Sometimes they decided, too, just where that long journey should end. There is the case of the Willis family's settlement in Greenwood county. Mrs. Amelia Tucker, of Eureka, who told me about it the other day, was a child when her family joined a party of homeseekers in the fall of '59. They reached the plains of Kansas, and water courses became less frequent, shelter was hard to find; still the men wanted to push further West.

MOTHER CHOSE THE HOME PLACE

The women were looking for homes, not adventure. Every day they suggested settling. One day a disordered company was met in full flight. They told a tale of Indians on the warpath and cabins abandoned and burned.

The little party from Illinois was gravely divided, but when camp was struck, Mrs. Willis stepped to her husband's side and said: "I have gone as far as I am going. We will turn back and settle over there." She pointed toward the valley of Fall River. "Get into the wagon, children, we are going back. Harrison, if you want to go on, you can take one wagon."

The whole party settled on the site of what is now Eureka. There were already a few homesteads grouped around a spring. They built a log cabin with two doors and no windows, because they had no glass. That was a superior farm house in those days. It was smaller than a room in many a modern farm house--say the Hammond farm mansion or the Huntington house.

It was Mrs. Willis who brought the pumpkin and melon seeds from Illinois which yielded the only crop that survived the drought of 1860.

With the beginning of the third winter the clothing brought from the East was threadbare. Amelia had to have a new dress. It was just plain pink calico and cost fifty cents at the store.

LUXURY--A LUMP OF SUGAR

"One family of settlers brought out a whole barrel of sugar," Mrs. Tucker said. "We used to see the children nibbling great chunks of it. My mother thought that was wasteful. One day she went over to the new family and bought about half a bushel of sugar and father hollowed out a gourd for her to keep it in. That big gourd stood on a shelf, and the greatest treat for us children was to have a little.

"We made coffee of unbolted cornmeal parched with sorghum so that it formed into hard little pellets. It tasted good. Real coffee was a dollar a pound. We did not use flour every day. We kept it in the corner of the cabin and used it only for gravies. We liked jerked buffalo meat soaked over night and then stewed and eaten with flour gravy. Of course there was plenty of game, deer and elk, wild turkey, prairie chickens and rabbits.

"Before I finished school--it wouldn't do nowadays--the teacher, Edwin Tucker, asked me to marry him. Mother and father drove forty miles to get me some things, and Mother chose my wedding dress. It was brown. We thought of wear, not fashion, then. Mother made it herself. She never asked me what I wanted. I was taught not to care

what I wore as long as it was serviceable. But I was very proud of one thing Mother made us all, boys and girls, hats from wheat straw. She bleached and braided the straw and father made her a block. My hat was trimmed with a piece of ribbon that my aunt had sent out and it was my pride. I do not remember how many seasons we wore those hats. We never thought of wanting a change. Nowadays, girls have boxes full of hats that they say are out of style, though they are as good as new.

"Well, girls have more time now to think of clothes. I married at sixteen and went to keep house in my husband's home, which was considered quite a mansion. I raised seven children and had plenty to do with looking after them, keeping my house in order, and boarding the farm hands. All my children are grown now and my grandchildren have mechanical toys to play with."

But most of the young women of '59 came to Kansas as wives.

Sitting in her sunny kitchen, resting after morning's work, Mrs. Ose Holverson told me about coming from Wisconsin in the spring of '59.

A large party set out from Prairie du Chien, where they had gone by train. They took boat to Kansas City and there bought their outfits, oxen, wagons, provisions, seed.

TOO BUSY TO BE LONELY

Mrs. Holverson was twenty-one, rosy and laughing, and Knut, her man, was strong and determined.

They halted on the east branch of Fall River and built their cabin on the edge of the timber. The blue stem grass grew man high in the rich bottom land and the newcomers saw very little of their land for the grass. Their great enemy was the prairie fire. The Indians were the terror of the women. The men helped one another and worked for the common good. The women worked shoulder to shoulder with their mates. After the soil was turned they were all stricken with ague. Even the babies shivered and burned alternately and their girl mother fed them quinine by the spoonful to no avail.

"Sometimes we would all be down together, and sometimes, fever-stricken, we nearly lost courage, but we knew that if we could hold out we would win in the end. Like all the others, we lost everything in '60, but there was a crop the next year. I was much alone in the cabin with my babies but I was too busy to get lonely."

She looked wistfully out of the window across the garden plot to the next house.

"It will seem strange to you, but I was never so lonely in those days of work and nights of terror as I am here, sitting and resting. I would like to be back on the farm again. The old log cabin still stands behind the modern house we afterwards built. One of my children lives there now. I planted creepers around the rough

doorway and saplings in front. I used to stand in my doorway in the evening and look off over the creek then beyond to where my Knut was turning sod, and I made all sorts of plans for the babies clinging to my skirts. I settled them on rich farms and dreamed of full barns and live stock. I thought they would live the sort of life that I lived, but I never dreamed of all the wonderful machines that would soon turn farming into a science. I see that a farm lad now must have education if he is going to be a good farmer and I realize that when a drought comes in these days, as it did come last summer, the farmers will not give up to it, but will provide against its happening again. Oh, how I long to be young again to work in these days and help do the wonderful things that are being done!"

"I am so ashamed of the terror I used to have of the Indians." The dear old lady blushed. "I hated their wrinkled, leathery bodies and their hideous painted faces. I used to go quite blind with fear and sometimes I could scarcely work for my trembling knees. Women today have nothing to fear. We stitched at endless seams with a baby across our knees, another clinging to our skirts. Fear of savages they drank in with their milk, poor little things. My daughters have sewing machines and from the mail order houses they can actually buy clothes for their families ready made. Children go to and from the district school in motor cars. We early settler women drew scanty water from deep wells more often at the stable than at the house door. We washed our heavy clothes with soap we had made ourselves. Our fingers were burned with lye and cracked with cold. Today the farm women wash by machines run by electricity, and only their brains need to work."

STORIES FROM GREENWOOD COUNTY PIONEER WOMEN

(Continued from last week)

In an upper chamber, surrounded by her books, her papers, her church quarterlies, her sewing and her daguerrotypes, I found Mrs. Judith Kenner. She was born in 1824 and came out from Albion, Illinois, in 1860. She was the mother of two when she was nineteen and she determined the move. When her uncle left the home town in the spring of 1859, she said, "Next year we will follow you."

Her husband was a Christian minister and a farmer. He agreed to move. The little family spent six weeks on the trail.

A LARK FOR THE SMALL BOYS

"Saturday afternoons we usually made our camp near some settlement. We would have a meeting on Sunday and we women would cook up provisions for the week. We were luckier than most pioneers for we had a cow in our train. My two little boys looked upon the journey as a prolonged lark and there were really no hardships until the winter of '62.

"We brought clothing to last us for two years. As a minister's wife I often had company. One Sunday night I entertained wighteen guests for the night in our little cabin on the farm. I never once found myself with no food. There wasn't much variety, to be sure, corn meal and pork, wheat-coffee and sorghum, the usual fare, and for Sundays chicken.

"We milled at Emporia, forty miles away, and what with taking his turn at going to the towns and going off to preach, my husband was away much of the time. I rode a great deal. With one little boy in front and one behind me in the saddle I trotted over the prairies and got to know my neighbors.

"It was pretty hard to get along without news from our old home at first, and when the government mail carrier was routed through the county, it seemed as if we were real civilized. But my, that was only once a fortnight, and now every farmer has his little mail box on a crooked post for the rural free delivery man."

She paused; her clear eyes wandered to the window.

"I used to sit sewing by my cabin door waiting for news from home, just as I'm sitting now, waiting for a call from the other side. Only then I was so busy that the time slipped by fast enough.

"But I like to hear the boys tell about all the improvements in the county. And I'd like mighty well to go round to all the old farms and see the silos full of winter feed all chopped up fine by electricity. The only thing I haven't figured out is what women are going to do. They must have time on their hands. But I reckon

they spend more time with their children than we could. I live to see them go by in their cars packed with children, and sometimes they have a youngster at the wheel no bigger'n your thumb.

"I think they are having larger families, too, and that's what our country needs, plenty of strong young men and healthy girls. I should think they would rather live in the country with all the conveniences that they can have now, but lots of them prefer town and the men go out to farm or feed their cattle. I hear them riding by before daybreak on their jaunts."

A PIANO IN A PRAIRIE SCHOONER

Mrs. John Bryden, of the same county, came with her family from Virginia after the war. The railway had been pushed as far as Topeka. From there an ox-team conveyed the party, father and mother, children and negro servants, a piano and other household treasures, to their new home.

The Ravenscroft farm was for years a landmark because it was surrounded by a tall Osage Orange hedge. This the children planted seed by seed. The father brought some Kentucky horses and as a little girl, Mrs. Bryden galloped the prairies, herding cattle and helping at the round-ups.

"I am sometimes rather sorry for the girls nowadays," she said. "It must be very tame riding along fenced section roads and never getting a chance to let out across country.

"We had just enough hardship and privation to make us strong and energetic. I know that modern women are supposed to find much to complain of, but for me, I think they are blessed. Our mothers had a hard time; they suffered and struggled and sacrificed, and it seems to me that the trouble with the younger women is that they work, but they do not enjoy it as we did. They look for enjoyment outside their work.

"There was really no time set aside for recreation when I was a girl. When in the long winter evenings, one of the family read aloud, the girls had some sort of sewing and the boys made their occupations, too.

"We visited, of course, and young people from neighboring farms came to see us. I remember our first visitors. We children saw them a long way off. The two Kansas boys riding their yellow ponies trotted up and introduced themselves. We younger fry stood shyly behind and longed for a little attention. Soon we returned the visit and our families became friends, and so it went. Twenty young people would pile into a lumber wagon and go to a distant farm to a party. There were rarely old folks along and we never had any trouble. Gaiety was too rare to be spoiled

by gossip."

Such were the pioneers, the mothers of Kansas. Not one had a word of complaint. Not one but longed to be at her work, who took pride in what she had accomplished, who looked back upon the pioneer days with loving memory. It was hard, but "it was a glorious victory."

Note: The writer of these articles grew up in Eureka. She was Daisy Hardy, the daughter of Captain and Mrs. W. R. Hardy, who lived in the big house at 302 South Washington now owned by Mrs. Pearl Thompson. Captain Hardy managed the city's power plant.

In 1895 Daisy went to Italy to join her sister Elena, or Eleanor, who had gone to Florence the previous year to study music and voice culture. Daisy remained in Italy for six years, studying ancient art and criticism under masters, visiting a number of European capitals while doing so.

In 1913 Daisy, then Mrs. Karl Walters, and her husband were on the reportorial staff of the Kansas City Star. Daisy came to Eureka that year to interview several pioneer women for Star feature stories. Ethel Mahan, Eureka photographer, took pictures for Daisy, including the old log cabin on the Knut Holverson place, and the old farm house on the Tucker farm. She also photographed the old mill near Eureka, and the modern farm home of the Hammonds, northwest of town.

Daisy Hardy Walters felt that it was high time someone wrote the story of the pioneer women who came to Greenwood County before the Civil War. Most stories had been concerned with men. She interviewed Mrs. Amelia Willis Tucker, wife of Edwin Tucker, to get the story of Hannah Willis, wife of Harrison J. Willis, who came in the fall of 1859. She also interviewed Mrs. Ose Holverson, who had come from Wisconsin with her husband Knut in 1859, when she was twenty-one.

The third woman Daisy interviewed was Mrs. Judith Kenner, whose husband ran the first general store in Eureka, then settled on a Bachelor Creek farm. The fourth to be interviewed, Mrs. John Bryden, who had been a Ravenscroft girl, told what it was like to be a little girl in Greenwood County in the late 1850's.

By 1916, according to the Herald, Daisy was editing the woman's page of the Kansas City Star. She was also doing musical interviews for that paper, in the absence of her husband, who had been music and dramatic editor of the Star before he went to England to join the British army. He was a native Englishman.

At this writing, we do not know "the rest of the story"; that is still to be discovered. Daisy Hardy's distinction is that she seemed to be among the first to give pioneer women their due for the part they played in the history of Greenwood County.

